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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RABAT 000422

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PTER KISL MO XF XA

SUBJECT: EXTREMISM AND TERROR IN MOROCCO PART III: THE GOM  
RESPONSE

REF: A. RABAT 400  
1B. RABAT 398  
1C. 07 RABAT 890  
1D. 07 RABAT 1229

(C) Classified by Ambassador Thomas Riley for reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

This is the third in a three-part cable series on extremism  
and terror in Morocco.

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Summary  
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11. (C) The Moroccan Government has pursued an interdisciplinary counterterrorism strategy incorporating aggressive law enforcement and intelligence operations with "soft" de-radicalization efforts including theological outreach, media engagement, and social development initiatives. Though the general approach is sound, resource gaps, uneven political will, and external events fueling radical views have so far limited the scope and impact of the government's efforts. In concluding this three part cable series, we believe that the historical background (ref A), socio-political factors (ref B), and Morocco's interdisciplinary efforts to check extremism and terror, discussed in this message may offer parallels and lessons for other Islamic countries, or for countries grappling with Islamic extremism among immigrant communities. End summary.

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An Interdisciplinary Response  
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12. (C) The Moroccan government has responded to the threat from jihadist terror on three fronts: operational, ideological, and environmental/developmental. On the first, Moroccan law enforcement and intelligence operations, which benefit from strong cooperation with the USG, have been proactive, vigilant, and lucky in disrupting and preempting numerous home-grown networks and cells planning or at least contemplating terror attacks. The GOM seems to have drawn lessons from its response to the 2003 attacks, more recently preferring targeted arrests based on investigative leads over the traditional large scale sweeps of "likely suspects." In recent years, terror suspects have generally been accorded due process of law, with more access for defense lawyers and more transparent court proceedings.

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Counter-Theology  
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13. (C) On the second front, the GOM has engaged Salafi jihadists on the ideological battlefield. Reversing Hassan II's patronage of Wahabbi Islam, Mohammed VI and his

government have been working to instead promote a distinctly Moroccan brand of Islam which emphasizes precepts of tolerance, dialogue and non-violence. The King personally patronized and attended in 2007 a large gathering in Fes of members of the Tariqa Tijania, a moderate spiritualist Sufi order with tens of millions of adherents spread across North and West Africa.

**¶14. (C)** In 2002, Mohammed VI dismissed the Wahabbi-leaning Abdelkebir M'Daghri as Minister of Islamic Affairs and replaced him with Ahmed Toufiq, a prominent intellectual and member of the moderate Bouchichi Sufi order. Under Toufiq, the Islamic Affairs Ministry successfully navigated the GOM through socially progressive (and controversial) revisions to the family law code, which is based on Islamic Shari'a. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs (MOIA) has also pioneered the training and deployment of Murshidat, female spiritual guides, who, along with newly trained male counterparts, conduct community outreach to promote moderate interpretations of Islam.

**¶15. (C)** MOIA has also integrated comparative religion into its training curriculum for new Imams and Murshidat, and begun broadcasting moderate Islamic material through the "Mohammed VI" satellite channel. Each Ramadan, the King hosts a series of religious lectures, inviting Muslim speakers from around the world, including the U.S., to promote moderate and peaceful religious interpretations. The primary target audiences for the Royal Ramadan lectures are the religious establishment and influential Muslim intellectuals, rather than the broader public, reflecting a GOM attempt to influence and moderate, through intellectual argument, the national religious discourse.

RABAT 00000422 002 OF 003

**¶16. (C)** The MOIA has also tightened its control of mosques and the Imams that preside in them, and regulates the content of Friday sermons delivered across the country. MOIA officials privately concede to us that their efforts in this area remain hampered by resource limitations, and complain they can't compete with the inexpensive religious literature, imported from the Middle East and mainly of a Wahabbi character, that continues to flood the Moroccan market. As the GOM works to curb Wahabbi influence within the Kingdom's borders, the MOIA also dispatches Imams to minister to Moroccan communities in Western Europe, where Wahabbis are reportedly active and well-resourced.

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Prisons  
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**¶17. (C)** The status of Islamist prisoners in Morocco has been a principal subject of public debate since the April 8 escape of 9 Salafists convicted of involvement in the 2003 Casablanca bombings from Kenitra prison, 40 km north of Rabat. The GOM appears increasingly convinced that Moroccan prisons are an important front in the battle against extremism. Ministry of Islamic Affairs officials have privately admitted to us their concern about the prevalence of extremist theology in parts of the prison population and acknowledged the difficulty of countering it with government Imams who lack credibility in the eyes of prisoners. The Ministry of Justice, which administers Moroccan prisons, conducted some pilot deradicalization programs in collaboration with the British Government and is in preliminary discussion with the USG about designing a broader systematic strategy.

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Social Development  
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**¶18. (C)** On the third front, the GOM has been working to address the poverty and social marginalization that are seen

as contributing elements in the incubation of extremism and terror. Again reversing his father's legacy, Mohammed VI has sought to make social development a cornerstone of his reign.

The monarch continuously traverses the kingdom to promote his National Human Development Initiative (INDH), setting foot in obscure places his father purposely avoided for political reasons, cutting ribbons for new clinics, vocational training centers, and community youth centers, etc.

¶9. (C) While the total cost of individual projects the King inaugurates are sometimes less than the cost of the royal entourage's visit to a given rural community, the Palace seems determined to convey the image of Mohammed VI as "King of the poor," a message which appears to have resonated with the Moroccan public. However, critics charge that INDH projects, which total out at 10 billion dirham (about USD 1.3 billion) over the next five years, are of insufficient scale to effectively reverse the major deficits in Morocco's health care, education, and other social sectors.

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Public Confidence in System Remains Tepid  
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¶10. (C) Moreover, public confidence in Morocco's political system remains in a state of acute crisis, as evidenced by the 37 percent turnout in the fall 2007 elections. This disappointing figure was attained despite unprecedented public and private efforts to persuade Moroccans to come out and vote. Moroccans are frustrated by public corruption which seems to pervade every level of government, from the humblest meter maid to provincial governors and members of parliament. This rampant corruption not only threatens any effective reforms in education, health, or justice, it undermines any perceived public benefit from the INDH and other social programs.

¶11. (C) Though the King personally enjoys significant public support, many complain that the country is governed by a small, corrupt, and closed circle of francophone elites who owe their power to their personal proximity to the Monarch. The King has signaled that he is aware of the corruption problem and is determined to address it, but so far, relatively few tangible steps have been taken.

¶12. (C) With the GOM's resources strained to the limit by subsidies offsetting rising food and fuel prices, and with ambiguity about the government's political will to address

RABAT 00000422 003 OF 003

public alienation by attacking corruption and expanding opportunities to the socially and economically disenfranchised majority, the effort to combat many of the root causes of extremism and terror will remain at least partially hampered for the foreseeable future.

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Comment  
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¶13. (C) In concluding this series on extremism in Morocco, we believe the historical and political factors which set the stage for extremism to emerge here (ref A) are relevant to the experience of other Arab and Islamic countries. Conclusions drawn from our direct observations and local cases appear to mirror those in the emerging research literature. The observed roles in Morocco of social alienation and perceived injustice as drivers in the formation of extremists and jihadist terrorists (ref B) are consistent with a growing body of scholarly research on the causes of the broader phenomenon. Morocco's experiences with extremism, and elements of its effort to counter it, likely offer lessons for policy makers confronting similar challenges in other Islamic countries as well as for countries hosting significant Muslim expatriate communities.

End comment.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>  
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Riley